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ABSTRACT

This paper examines academic degree programs that train outdoor leaders. A review of previous studies of outdoor leadership noted 12 critical core competencies of an effective outdoor leader. A survey of college outdoor programs identified 15 four-year academic degree programs in outdoor leadership at U.S. colleges and universities. The programs were found in both large and small schools and public and private institutions; went by a wide variety of names; and were housed in various departments, which influenced available and required courses. Technical skills formed the backbone of most curricula, while about half of schools required a specific course in interpersonal communication or group process. The range of emergency skills required by schools was quite large. Forty percent of schools required a specific course in teaching methods. Almost all schools required a leadership course, and 80 percent required a practicum experience in leadership. All schools required a core of introductory theory courses in outdoor, adventure, or environmental education. Required courses in administration were quite varied. There was no clear consensus on outdoor leadership training in the higher education setting, reflecting the lack of nationally accepted professional standards for outdoor education and the absence of any accreditation body to standardize outdoor curricula. However, it appears that most college programs require courses that develop the necessary outdoor competencies cited in the literature. (SV)

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Outdoor Leadership Education: The Past, Present and Future

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ABSTRACT:

Leadership education is important in the development of safe, effective leaders in outdoor pursuits. Several models of leadership education exist: co-curricular training programs, organizational training programs, and academic programs. A growing trend is for potential leaders to spend several years at a college or university in a degree program specifically designed to teach them the skills and techniques of outdoor leadership. This paper will present past research that speaks to the competencies necessary in outdoor leadership and current research designed to compare academic degree programs that train outdoor leaders with the previously documented competencies.

INTRODUCTION:

Leadership education is important in the development of safe, effective leaders in outdoor pursuits. The use of the outdoors for educational, recreational and therapeutic purposes has increased in the past decade resulting in increased participant injuries and environmental damage (Priest & Gass, 1997). These results have precipitated the need for competent leaders to teach the skills necessary to safely use the outdoors. Where do these leaders receive their training? Several models of leadership education exist: co-curricular training programs, organizational training programs, and academic degree programs. A growing trend is for potential leaders to spend several years at a college or university setting in a degree program specifically designed to teach them the skills and techniques of outdoor leadership. This paper will present leadership education from two perspectives: (1) past research that documents the competencies, skills and techniques necessary for effective outdoor leadership and (2) current research designed to compare those documented competencies with current academic degree programs that train outdoor leaders. The purpose of the paper is to discover if the competencies are being taught to potential outdoor leaders.

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PAST RESEARCH:

Research on outdoor leadership education started in the 1970's. Early studies by Shiner (1970), Cousineau (1977), and Mendenice (1979) developed a database of competencies for outdoor leaders and recommended educational programs to train potential outdoor leaders. Green (1981), Swiderski (1981), and Buell (1981) built upon the previous studies and also identified specific competencies, though their studies were more region specific. The content of Buell's study resulted in a manual designed for leaders to compare their self-assessed skills and experiences with the national rankings (Buell, 1983). Priest did similar studies in 1984 and in 1986 which included more international respondents. In 1987, Priest used a metanalysis of the previous studies to determine the critical core competencies of an effective outdoor leader that included: 1) technical skills; 2) safety skills; 3) minimum impact skills; 4) organizational skills; 5) instructional skills; 6) facilitation skills; 7) flexible leadership skills; 8) experience-based judgment; 9) problem-solving skills; 10) decision-making skills; 11) effective communication skills; and 12) professional ethics. The most recent study was a 10-year longitudinal study completed by Raiola (1996) who looked at competencies and teaching methods in an academic curriculum.

With the critical core competencies of outdoor leaders well documented, it is important to look at if, as well as how these skills and techniques are being taught to potential leaders in college and university settings. It is appropriate to look at what is actually happening in terms of current practice. What curricula are being offered to students at college and universities that offer degrees in outdoor leadership? What courses are required in each program? What specific skills and techniques are being taught in each course?

METHODOLOGY:

In this study I reviewed 15 four-year academic degree programs in outdoor leadership at colleges and universities in the United States to compare what was being taught with the documented competencies and to make some generalizations about how outdoor leaders are currently being trained in higher education. Potential programs were identified through the Association of Experiential Education and the Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education membership directories. A faculty member from each potential program was contacted and asked to send material on the degree program including catalog copy, specific program information, and any promotional materials used. I reviewed the material and eliminated two-year programs, schools with minors in Outdoor Education/Leadership, schools outside the United States, and schools that were in the process of developing academic programs.

I first looked at general information from each school such as title of the degree program, the department where the degree program was housed, total number of credits required, and percentage of credits that were specifically oriented to leadership education. I then examined course titles and descriptions from college catalogs and program materials and sorted the titles into the following categories: technical skills, including land based and water based; interpersonal skills; emergency skills; teaching methods; leadership; practical experience; leadership with various populations; theory; and administration. Within each category specific courses offered by schools were recorded and the number of schools requiring each course was tabulated. A limitation of the study was the fact that course titles and descriptions did not always accurately reflect the entire curriculum

of a course. I found that the titles and descriptions were generalizations of course content, and as a result, had to make potentially misleading decisions about what was included or not included in program curricula.

RESULTS:

There did not seem to be a typical school at which programs were offered; degree programs occurred in both large universities and in small schools and in both public and private institutions. There was no agreement as to what to call these degree programs, as the titles differed tremendously from school to school. Titles included "Wilderness Leadership," "Outdoor Leadership," "Outdoor Leadership and Instruction," "Experiential Education," "Adventure Education," "Outdoor Education," "Outdoor Adventure Education," "Outdoor Recreation" and "Adventure Recreation."

The department where degree programs were housed varied greatly between schools, and tended to impact the courses within the program. Out of the 15 schools, 9 (60%) were located in Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER), Recreation Management, or Leisure Studies departments. Two programs were located in Kinesiology or Exercise Science, one in Environmental Sciences, and three in outdoor or adventure education/leadership. The total number of credits required for the degree varied from a low of 46 credits to a high of 84 credits. In the total number of credits required, some schools tended to require courses strictly related to outdoor leadership such as technical skills, group process, leadership and administration. Other school stressed course work in the natural sciences, psychology, and education. Programs within Health, Physical Education and Recreation departments tended to have community based recreation courses required as well as outdoor leadership courses. The percentage of required credits in each curriculum that were specifically outdoor leadership focused ranged from 22.2% to 86.8%. Refer to Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC DEGREE PROGRAMS

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	PROGRAM TITLE	DEPARTMENT	TOTAL CRDTS/ % OL FOCUS
Brevard College	Wilderness Leadership Experiential Education	Exercise Science	49/81.6
Eastern Washington University	Outdoor Recreation	Recreation/Leisure Services	84/59.5
Ferris State University	Outdoor/Adventure Education	Rec. Leadership Management	80/25.0
Georgia College	Outdoor Education	HPER	53/45.2
Green Mt. College	Adventure Recreation	Recreation/Leisure Studies	65/67.6

FIGURE 1 (CON'T)
FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC DEGREE PROGRAMS

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	PROGRAM TITLE	DEPARTMENT	TOTAL CREDITS/ % OL FOCUS
Northern Michigan University	Outdoor Recreation Leadership/Management	HPER/OR Division	54.5/49.5
Northland College	Adventure Education	Outdoor Education	59/76.3
Prescott College	Wilderness Leadership	Adventure Education	-
Unity College	Outdoor Recreation	Environmental Sciences	70/71.4
University of Alaska/ Anchorage	Adventure/Outdoor Education	Physical Education	72/22.2
University of New Hampshire	Outdoor Education	Kinesiology	69/86.8
University of Southern Colorado	Outdoor Adventure Education	HPER	46/56.5
Warren Wilson College	Outdoor Leadership	Outdoor Leadership	84/61.9
Western Carolina University	Outdoor Leadership and Instruction	Parks/Recreation Management	75/42.6
Western State College	Outdoor Leadership and Instruction	Recreation	62/54.8

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Technical skills formed the backbone of many curricula, with leadership, theory and administration courses building on the skills learned in the beginning skills courses. In terms of land based skills, specific courses offered and the percentage of schools requiring each included backpacking (93%), winter camping (60%), top rope climbing (53%), map and compass (53%), challenge courses (53%), mountaineering (40%), cross country skiing (27%), lead climbing (20%), biking (20%), outdoor living (13%) and ice climbing (6%). Water based skills included canoeing (73%), kayaking (47%), rafting (27%), sea kayaking (20%) and lifeguarding (13%).

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Seven of the 15 schools (47%) required a specific course in interpersonal communication or group process. Example course titles included "Group Dynamics," "Adventure Activities, Facilitation and Group Behavior," and "Group Process." Several

schools offered a course that combined leadership and group dynamics and was titled as such.

EMERGENCY SKILLS

The range of emergency skills required by schools was quite large. Five schools (33%) required Wilderness First Responder, Outdoor Emergency Care was required by 3 schools (20%), Wilderness Emergency Care by 2 schools (13%) and only one school (7%) required the following: Sports Medicine, Basic First Aid, Advanced First Aid, Wilderness Second Aid, EMT, Wilderness EMT and Survival Education. Out of the 15 schools, 4 (27%) required a course in search and rescue. Several schools required more than one course in emergency skills: EMT and Wilderness EMT; Advanced First Aid and Wilderness Second Aid; and Sports Medicine and Wilderness Emergency Care.

TEACHING METHODS

Six schools out of the 15 reviewed (40%) required a specific course in teaching methods. Examples of course titles in this category included: "Outdoor Education Teaching Techniques," "Experiential Education Methods," and "Instructional Methods."

LEADERSHIP

Out of the 15 schools surveyed, 14 required some type of leadership course. Eleven schools (73%) offered a course in outdoor leadership; 8 schools (53%) offered a course in recreation leadership. In 6 schools (40%), the only leadership course required was outdoor leadership. Three schools (13%) required only a course in recreation leadership. Five schools (33%) required both outdoor leadership and recreation leadership. One school did not require a course in leadership and did not offer it in the curriculum. Several schools required coursework in leadership with various populations that was represented by three areas: therapeutic recreation required by 7 of the 15 schools (47%); adventure based therapy required by 3 schools (20%); and a course titled "Gender Responsible Adventure Education" required by one school. Many schools were involved in requiring outside leadership experience of their students in the format of practica and internships. Eighty percent of the schools surveyed required some sort of practicum experience, and 73% required an outside internship.

THEORY

There seemed to be a core of introductory theory courses that were required by schools and from there a wide variety of additional theory courses arose. All 15 schools required some sort of basic theory course with titles such as "Philosophy and Methods of Outdoor Education," "Theory of Adventure Education" and "Introduction to: Recreation and Leisure; Outdoor Recreation; Outdoor Education; and Environmental Education." Examples of titles of additional courses which were required included: "Commercial Recreation;" "High Adventure Travel;" "Interpretation;" "Social Psychology of Leisure;" "Ethics;" and "Philosophers." Five of the 15 schools (33%) required a Senior Seminar course covering advanced theoretical concepts.

ADMINISTRATION

The area of program administration was also extremely varied. Most schools required a base of program planning and administration courses with many schools requiring additional courses to supplement that base. Seven schools (47%) required a course in program planning. Twelve out of the 15 schools (80%) required either recreation administration or outdoor education administration. Other topic areas required by many schools included facility management (47%), research (40%), legal issues (20%) and management of natural resources (20%). Examples of other course titles offered in the area of outdoor leadership administration included: "Accounting;" "Marketing;" "Human Resource Management;" "Camp Administration;" "Budgeting;" "Finance;" and "Administration of Commercial Recreation."

CONCLUSIONS:

The major conclusion of the study is that there is no clear consensus on outdoor leadership training in the college and university academic setting. There is a wide variety in how leadership training is delivered to potential outdoor leaders based on the following:

- the philosophy of the school within which the academic program is housed (for example smaller liberal arts colleges tended to require additional coursework in psychology and natural sciences because of their liberal arts philosophy);
- the department within which the academic program is housed (for example programs in Health, Physical Education, and Recreation departments tended to require additional recreation courses); and
- the location of the university or college (for example schools in the southern United States tended not to offer courses in winter camping).

Other factors that affect the academic curriculum, but were not examined in this study are:

- the relationship of school size to the number of courses offered;
- the number of students in the major;
- the total number of students in the school;
- the number of full and part time faculty members in the program; and
- the financial situation of the program and the college or university.

There are no nationally accepted standards from the professional field of outdoor education that dictate what should be taught in a leadership development program. Neither is there any accreditation body that standardizes outdoor leadership curriculum. The Association for Experiential Education accredits outdoor programs based on safety and administrative organization, not based on academic curriculum. The only standards would seem to arise from the research on outdoor leadership competencies that conclude that a competent outdoor leader should have a strong base of technical, interpersonal, and safety skills upon which are built leadership, facilitation, and teaching with a strong underpinning of theory. Based on the above competencies and the results of this study, it seems that college academic programs are requiring curricula that develop the necessary competencies in potential outdoor leaders. Yet different schools deliver these curricula using different methods, depending on the resources available to them.

Further studies should be completed which look into more specifics: how and where are skills being taught; what is the best progression of courses that will develop competent leaders; and in job situations, how do leaders trained in an academic setting compare with those who were not. Since academic programs in outdoor leadership are growing, it is important to develop a body of knowledge concerning how to best train safe and effective leaders.

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